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ABSTRACT

This publication describes the accreditation process for day care centers in Australia and illustrates how the process is being managed in three child care centers in inner city, rural, and suburban areas. Guiding the process is the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), developed by the National Childcare Accreditation Council, which requires child care centers to conduct a collaborative self-analysis to determine quality of care and education. The five QIAS steps are reviewed: (1) registration; (2) self-study; (3) review; (4) moderation by the Council; and (5) decision by the Council. The self-study process is defined as an ongoing cycle of evaluation, interpretation, goal setting, implementation, and returning to evaluation. The importance of securing family involvement on the Quality Improvement and Accreditation Committee, which is responsible for guiding and monitoring center progress, is emphasized. Recommendations are made for motivating the staff team and a chart detailing commonly asked questions regarding the QIAS and responses is included. A major component of the self-evaluation--staff observation--is described. The identification of center strengths and areas for improvement from the Parent Questionnaire and staff observation, and from the development, implementation, and evaluation of a written Plan of Action are detailed. Recommendations for the review by the moderators of the National Childcare Accreditation Council are listed. The report to the center is based on the moderator's report to the Council and the accreditation decision. The ongoing process of review is emphasized. An appendix shows portions of the self-study materials. (KDFB)

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The very best of care and education

Many ways to the Quality Improvement & Accreditation System

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Leanne Gibbs

The very best of care and education

Leanne Gibbs

Foreword

Thinking about what is done and why, about whether it can be done better and how, is a process which is at the heart of improved practice in child care no less than in any other field.

The Accreditation and Beyond Series supports that process in practical ways.

Each of the books in the series puts ideas about good practice up against the understandings about children and their needs on which they are based. This is done deliberately. There are no recipes for good practice. There are, however, principles which can be used as a benchmark for deciding whether what is being done is good for children and the people who work with them. Many of these are drawn out in this series.

The impetus for the series was to provide practical support to services participating in the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System. However, it is also intended that the series be an ongoing reference for early childhood professionals and services working to provide quality care for children.

It is not meant to be a final statement on any of the areas it covers and the range and depth of the series is deliberately diverse as is the child care sector.

The diversity in child care practice in long day care centres across Australia is the focus of ***The very best of care and education.***

This book describes the accreditation process emphasising the diversity, and illustrating it by using practical examples of the way the process is being managed in three different child care centres.

Other titles in the series are:

- Staff–Child interactions: A Vygotskian perspective;
- Babies need more than minding: Planning programs for babies and toddlers in group settings;
- The policy handbook: Developing policies in child care;
- Surviving Accreditation; A QIAS ideas bank;
- Highlighting health: A discussion of health practices and accreditation; and
- Thought for food: A starting point on children's nutritional meals.

AECA hopes that these books will assist in making the accreditation experience rich, constructive and successful, and that the series will be an ongoing resource to services.

Tonia Godhard
President

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Contents

Foreword i

Introduction 1

The five steps in the QIAS: An overview 3

The Self-Study process... *Keep it simple* 5

Establishing a Centre Quality Improvement and Accreditation Committee 7

Motivating the Staff Team 9

Look around... *What do we see?* 13

Where to now? Putting the profile together 15

The strengths of the Centre 17

The areas for improvement: *Where do we begin?* 18

Ready for review 23

What next? 25

Life after the review: *The ongoing process of accreditation* 26

References 27

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Introduction

The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) was introduced, in its current form, to Australian child care centres in January 1994. The broad objective of the system is:

> *'...to ensure that the children in long day care centres have stimulating, positive experiences and interactions which will follow all aspects of their development.' (p.i, Handbook)*

The system requires the child care centre to undertake a thorough self-analysis to determine the quality of care and education provided to the children. It is a collaborative process that involves everyone who takes part in the activities of the centre: staff, parents, and other members of the community.

The reward for involvement in the process is an assurance that the children at the centre are being offered the best care and education in a warm and secure environment.

What does the development of a nationally consistent accreditation system mean?

The ideal result of the QIAS is that all child care centres across Australia will offer similar levels of quality care. This means that the care of a toddler in, for example, Broome, Western Australia, will be of the same quality as the care for a toddler in Campsie, NSW. This will apply across the age groups in all centres.

There is no intention that the care will be generic, or so closely controlled that it disregards the needs of the families within the community. The QIAS is all about ensuring the quality of care for all children across Australia, while celebrating and strengthening the individuality of those children and their communities.

The continuing role of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System

At this stage of its implementation it is important to acknowledge the ongoing role that the QIAS will play in the life of a child care centre. Accreditation is a process, not an event, and should be treated as such. The system cannot be seen as an isolated document that has life breathed into it each time the centre is due for review.

Detailed attention to the 52 principles of care and education set out in the *Handbook*, will provide a sound framework for every child care centre. In the future we will see that the best centres are those which have embraced the process of Accreditation and use the system as a tool for the planning and achievement of their goals.

What this book is about

This book is about making the QIAS work in your centre. It contains guidelines to the process and practical examples that will demonstrate the application of the principles. If you have doubts about whether you are 'getting this thing right' the diversity of practice will demonstrate that there are many different ways to meet the criteria of the system.

The QIAS is not a strict prescription, but rather a guide that will be characterised by the unique nature and diversity of child care centres Australia-wide.

The structure of this book

This book aims to describe the process of the QIAS. There are explanations of the way in which the process may be implemented in a centre. It is important to keep in mind that centres across Australia are different, and will offer varied approaches to the care of children.

In addition to these explanations and suggestions, there are practical examples of the way in which the Accreditation System is being managed in three different child care centres. These descriptions and accounts relate to specific to aspects of the system. Within most sections you will find a 'Snapshot' that gives a picture of the way in which the centre went about that part of the process.

There is no prescribed approach to the process. The indicators are a guide to the spirit of the principles. The practical examples within the book are provided as a springboard for creating innovative approaches in your centre. There is an emphasis upon the diversity that exists within child care centres.

The five steps in the QIAS: *An overview*

There are five steps in the QIAS. Each must be completed in order to achieve a standard of accreditation.

1. Registration

This is the simplest step within the process. It involves the completion of a registration form from the National Childcare Accreditation Council and the payment of a scheduled annual fee. Upon payment, centres receive the necessary supporting documents required to work through the process.

Documents required by centre: Registration Form.

2. The Self-Study

This step is the most important within the accreditation process. The self-study gives all those involved with the centre an opportunity to critically analyse its program of care and education. The centre is required to look at this program under the 52 principles within the *Handbook*, and to determine the levels of care and education at the centre. This forms a basis for improvement.

This step includes the formation of the centre accreditation committee, staff observations, parent questionnaires, centre current standards and profiles, and plan of action. All people involved in the centre's operation are encouraged to play a part. Parents, staff, proprietors, and sponsors are some of the people who may participate in the centre's self-study.

Documents required by Centre: Handbook, Workbook, and at the conclusion of the self-study, Self-Study Report.

3. Review

After the centre has completed the self-study and submitted the *Self-Study Report* to the National Childcare Accreditation Council, an external review will be conducted. This is, in effect, a peer review system. All reviewers are required to have lengthy experience in early childhood service delivery, with at least two years' recent experience in long day care. Reviewers work in an honorary capacity for the council, with an arrangement for leave and reimbursement by the council.

An allocated reviewer visits the centre to scrutinise its *Self-Study Report*. The reviewer is trained to take an objective view of the program of care and education as described in the report.

Documents required for presentation to reviewer: as listed on the final page of *Self-Study Report*.

4. Moderation

Moderators have been appointed by Council to examine the self-assessment provided by the centre and the report from the reviewer. Moderators must possess a higher degree in Early Childhood and have

extensive experience in the early childhood field. The moderators are required to make recommendations to the National Childcare Accreditation Council on the length of time between review visits. Moderators will have a key role in ensuring national consistency.

5. Decision by the National Childcare Accreditation Council

Members of the National Childcare Accreditation Council are appointed by the Federal Minister for Family Services. Original appointments were made in consultation with the early childhood field and associated industry bodies and agencies.

The final decision on Accreditation is made by the National Child Care Accreditation Council. This decision is based on the centres' *Self-Study Report*, the reviewer's report and the moderators' report and recommendation. The council determines the length of time between review visits. A certificate of Accreditation will then be awarded.

The achievement of Accreditation within the centre is a great one. The fact that a range of people from the centre will have contributed toward the achievement gives cause for tremendous celebration. Reaching this first goal provides a strong foundation for the perpetuation of standards. Once Accreditation has been awarded to the centre the next goal will be to maintain a high standard within the centre and to consolidate the quality of care and education in practice. This is the first step in achieving the best quality environment for children in child care centres.

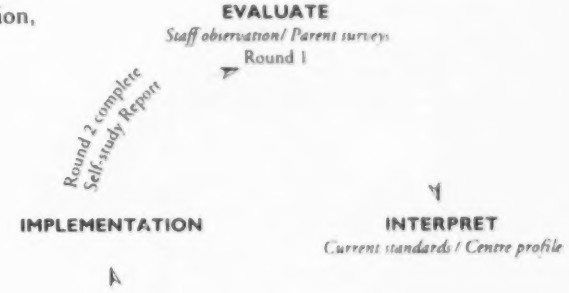
The Self-Study Process...
Keep it simple

Initially the self-study may seem complex and confusing but, as with anything new, familiarity brings comfort and understanding. The first step will be to open and read the documents and to encourage others to do this as well. Nothing is more fearful than the unknown. The documents you will need, to begin work on the self-study, are the *Handbook* of the 52 principles, and the ***Workbook***.

The requirements of the self-study are detailed in the 14 steps of the process. Centres should not be limited by these requirements. These steps are just the basis, and you will want to personalise the process and incorporate centre-specific approaches.

The Self-Study Process is simple. It is based on a cycle that commences with evaluation; moves onto interpretation; then onto the setting of goals, objectives and strategies; through to implementation, and returning to evaluation. The cycle is ongoing.

The self-study within the centre looks like this:



Practical anecdotes for the Self-Study Process will be presented from the viewpoints of three Australian centres — inner city, rural and suburban. The size, structure, staff complement, and demographic and physical environment of each centre are detailed.

The Centres

Day St Child Care Centre

- A 35–place child care centre in a metropolitan region of a large city.
- Family grouped for children six weeks to five years.
- The centre operates for 11 hours per day.
- Families using the service have a range of cultural backgrounds. For most parents English is a second language.
- The centre operates within a converted house.
- The staff is equivalent to five full-time workers.
- The staff comprises both full-and part-time workers who speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, and English.
- The centre has access to a resource centre and support staff specialising in working with families of a non-English speaking background. These resources are shared amongst a number of services.

Moorinda Bay Kindergarten

- A 25–place child care centre in coastal town.
- The centre is open to children from 2.5 years to five years of age.
- The centre operates for eight hours per day.
- Families using the service are primarily of Anglo descent and come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.
- The centre operates in a 'purpose built' facility.
- The three staff who work at the centre have been employed at Moorinda Bay for a number of years.
- The centre is reasonably isolated. It is the only child care facility in the small town but has formed communication networks with other isolated centres.

Dalmonde Child Care Centre

- A 90–place child care centre.
- The centre is separated into age groups and is open to children from six weeks to five years.
- The centre operates for 16 hours per day.
- Families using the service come from a wide range of cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The centre is close to a learning institution and a major business district.
- The centre has been operating for only two years; its main focus is on education for children with special needs.
- The centre relies primarily upon community resource services and specialist staff to support the care and education of children with special needs.

Establishing a Centre Quality Improvement and Accreditation Committee

The establishment of a centre accreditation committee is a vitally important step in the Self-Study Process. The committee will be responsible for guiding and monitoring progress at the centre. All those involved in the centre's operation should have a role in the committee, and be present when the Task and Timeline Chart is planned. The Task and Timeline Chart will give detail to the time frames for Accreditation. The committee will project dates for completion of steps within the process, and this will form a guide for progress within the centre.

The involvement of parents on a centre accreditation committee is of the utmost importance. As the children's first caregivers they can provide guidance and feedback about the program of care, and a sound basis for the development of the centre's philosophy, goals, and policy. High-quality programs depend on the success of the relationship between parents and the staff at the centre. A mutual respect and honesty amongst all those caring for the children will lead to responsive, loving environments. Participation and involvement are a prerequisite to the success of the QIAS at the centre. Parent representation on the committee is a compulsory requirement of the system.

The director or coordinator, staff and the centre's owner or sponsor will offer the committee other specialist skills and expertise. The aim of the process is to maximise the centre's potential through the use of a collaborative approach. If the work is shared by all members of the committee then the celebration of achievement and success is also shared.

Securing the involvement of Parents

Traditional approaches to parent participation in early childhood services may not be appropriate when establishing the centre accreditation committee. In all activities within the long day care centre, staff should be seeking parent involvement that fits in with work and family commitments. In establishing the committee there will be a number of factors to consider.

- Long day care centres are designed for use by parents/caregivers who are working. Committee meeting times must be planned around work hours.
- Families have varying levels of commitment to outside activities. Parents will want to be involved in the centre but the availability of time will differ.
- Parents will need to know how they can contribute and the way in which their skills can be best utilised. Specialist skills will be of great value to the centre in its ongoing commitment to the QIAS. Someone within the centre should take the responsibility for allocating tasks according to skills available.

How we did it.

Centre Accreditation Committees

Day St

We used our Parents' Orientation Evening to let parents know about the QIAS. The orientation meeting usually has a big turnout so the staff felt this was the best time. We identified the primary language groups of our families — Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Spanish, and English — and then staff who spoke those languages gave translations of the simple explanations about the system.

A number of parents volunteered for the committee, while others wanted to contribute to the process in other ways. We kept the committee at a workable size and called on other volunteers to help out with some of the administrative processes (for example, photocopying, tallying observation figures). Our committee was made up of four parents, two staff members, a sponsor representative, and the director.

Moorinda Bay

We took photos of the children and then attached these to a brightly coloured flyer. The flyer gave details of the Accreditation system and asked parents to become involved in the committee. I then approached parents individually and asked if they were interested.

We had a great response; I think they became interested because they understood the process was about better quality care for their children...it was the photo that initially sparked their interest.

Dalmonde

We organised a dinner for the parents of the centre. We had about 80 parents coming along, and the cook prepared a wonderful meal. When the evening had 'warmed up', our guest speaker gave a talk on Accreditation and its value for the centre.

There was a great atmosphere and people were very enthusiastic about the idea. We had too many volunteers, so as a group we decided how big the committee should be and then talked about how people's skills could be used in other ways. I remember thinking 'I've *got* to keep this enthusiasm going!!!'

Maintaining the centre accreditation committee

Once an enthusiastic committee is formed, its members' interest needs to be maintained. It is essential that meetings are planned and run according to scheduled times. Ideas for successful meetings include the following:

- Conduct meetings directly after, or shortly before, the centre closes so that parents do not need to go home and then return to the centre.
- Alternatively link meetings with a social event or another scheduled meeting. This will increase the number of people hearing about Accreditation.

- Provide refreshments and, if possible, child care so that participants are comfortable and relaxed.
- Keep meetings short and move the business along. This will require parents to have a prior knowledge of the agenda, and will encourage informed and focused decision-making.
- Look for ways for parents unable to attend meetings to be involved in the activities of the committee. Valuable contributions could be missed if the only way to participate is via meetings.

In exploring options and deciding on alternative approaches for the involvement of parents, child care professionals will be endorsing the importance of strong partnerships between teachers and parents. High-quality child care programs will flourish in this partnership, which is based on respect, trust, and an understanding of the way in which children grow and develop.

Motivating the Staff Team

Once a goal has been set with a team, there needs to be a strategy for its achievement. The centre's approach to Accreditation will be greatly enhanced if everyone involved can see value in the process. The process is compulsory for services in Australia seeking Commonwealth Child Care Assistance. This may not be incentive enough for staff teams to embrace the system. Every centre needs to work out how it will be valuable to its continued operation, for the benefit of the families and employees of the service.

The centre accreditation committee will need to start by answering some basic questions. The questions will ideally be raised by the staff themselves following the introduction of the QIAS. These can be answered in staff meetings, by writing to staff, or placing information sheets in prominent places for easy reading. It will be important to document this information for ready reference. (Figure 1, p.10, provides examples of commonly-asked questions form staff teams, and responses.) Centres may need to encourage participants in the self-study to raise their concerns. Doubts and misconceptions about the process could lead people to put up blocks when working through the self-study, and these will greatly reduce its effectiveness.

Figure 1. Commonly asked questions and responses

Q. Is the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System compulsory for my centre?

The QIAS is compulsory for centres seeking Commonwealth Child Care Assistance. Childcare Assistance is the subsidy provided to parents of the centre. It is assessed according to parents' income and is paid to the centre by the Commonwealth in lieu of fees. The implementation of the QIAS within our centre means that we are accountable for the quality of service for families, using the centre.

Q. How long will it take?

Services in operation in January 1994 must have registered, completed the self-study, and called for a review by June 1995. New services are now required to register prior to the conferring of Child Care Assistance. These services have 18 months to complete the self-study and call for a review. All centres will vary in the time taken to work through the process. Some teams will decide to work more quickly through the process. If the self-study is planned carefully, centres will not need to rush through it.

Q. What will I have to do?

Each staff member will be required to take part in the process. This process is about making our centre the best quality service that we can offer. It is important that we all understand and are involved in the QIAS. It will help us to make some valuable changes in our centre using the 52 principles in the *Handbook* as a guide. In the first instance we will need to ask ourselves 'Where are we at?'

When we have a full knowledge of where we stand in the areas of Interactions, the Program, Health, Safety and Nutrition, and Centre Management and Staff Development, we can start to look at ways to improve.

Each staff member will need to:

- complete a set of Staff Observation documents;
- discuss ratings and form an opinion about the centre's current status;
- contribute to the formation of the Plan of Action for making improvements in the centre;
- work on different areas, contributing to the implementation of the Plan of Action;
- complete a second set of Staff Observation documents;
- be present and involved in the review process; and
- celebrate the decision of the National Childcare Accreditation Council to accredit the centre;

Other ways in which staff may wish to be involved include:

- being a part of the centre accreditation committee;
- assisting in the documentation of the Centre Profile; and
- educating parents on the role of QIAS and its importance for their children.

Q. Will I have to work additional hours?

The Staff Observations may be completed during programming time, team meetings, at quiet periods of the day, during staff meetings, and when the centre is lower in numbers and staff can be released from hands-on work with the children. You may make a personal choice to contribute your own time for the benefit of professional growth.

The QIAS is a tool for change. Changes and improvements will always need to be made in a centre. Here is the ideal opportunity to take the step toward the achievement of change.

Q. How will this process benefit me both personally and professionally?

As the QIAS is designed for a collaborative approach, there will be skill development in the areas of team work, implementation of change within the centre, communication, and knowledge acquisition.

Personal gains will include increase in self-esteem and confidence. These are the by-products in the setting and achievement of goals.

You may also feel encouraged to further your studies in Early Childhood through TAFE or university building upon knowledge and creating opportunities for you in the field.

Q. What will be the value of the QIAS to my centre?

- Quality environment and program for the children attending the centre.
- Involvement of parents in the centre's goals.
- Reassurance for new families joining the centre.
- Community awareness and respect for child care workers.

And much more.

Leading the team

One of the challenges is to implement a team approach to the QIAS, and to acknowledge and utilise staff skills. This requires strong skills in both leading the team and coordinating the process. A thorough knowledge of the system will greatly assist the leader. Attending training on the process, familiarisation with documents, and seeking information and support are some of the ways that knowledge will be gained.

Participation by all members of the child care team is integral to the success of the QIAS. Steps can be taken for the purpose of building a strong team. The centre accreditation committee may also be instrumental in this process, taking guidance from the leaders within the centre when working through the following steps.

1. Critically analyse the training, experience and skills of the people on your team.
   For example; are there particular staff within the centre familiar with the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System? These people could be allocated to other team members who need assistance in developing an understanding of the process.
2. Work with your team to develop a purpose or common goal.
   Do all of the team members understand that the goal of the process is to make quality improvements within the centre? Do they understand that the centre will eventually achieve Accreditation, a goal that will bring great pride to both the team and individuals.
3. Encourage, enthuse, and excite people in the promotion of the goal.
   Look for new and innovative approaches to generating enthusiasm. For example, the centre could become a model for specific areas of the program (e.g. promoting children's creativity in craft experiences,) and provide resource ideas and information to other centres.
4. Form structured plans for the coordination of the team to ensure success.
   The team will be involved in developing plans for improvements in the centre. Are the plans developed with success clearly in mind, and are the steps toward success clearly detailed?
5. Delegate and empower.
   Individuals should be entrusted to take responsibility for areas of interest within the centre. For example, is someone passionate about the area of science? That person will be an excellent resource when developing and implementing a plan for 'fostering children's curiosity' within the daily program.
6. Keep the vision alive...and keep people on track.
   All staff will need encouragement and feedback on their work. This will keep their enthusiasm alive and will greatly assist in the achievement of goals.
7. Evaluate the success of the team's work.
   Take time to say 'We did it!', and to celebrate the achievements of the team, before moving onto the next goal.

The completion of this set of steps will foster a thorough knowledge of the staff team and its members' willingness to contribute to the process. It is also an exercise in affirming a team's belief that its skills and work are recognised and valued. Individuals will often wait for acknowledgement before they are ready to commit themselves fully to a task.

Look around... *What do we see?*

The Process of Staff Observations; Evaluation Stage

Constant evaluation is essential in every child care centre. Changes to group sizes, or the way in which the children use the physical environment are examples of changes in the operation of the centre. The simplest way to review changes is to ask '...is it working?' This is evaluation at the most basic level, but it is a true indication of the success of the innovation.

In analysing the 52 principles of the QIAS, staff at the centre will start by asking themselves '...is this happening in our centre?'. Embarking on the Staff Observation Records will mark the start of the Self-Study Process. This is the time to analyse the program of care and education under the 52 principles of the *QIAS Handbook*.

The areas covered by the principles are:

- Part A Interactions amongst staff and children
  Interactions amongst staff and parents
  Interactions amongst staff
- Part B The Program
- Part C Health, Safety, and Nutrition
- Part D Centre Management and Staff Development

This evaluation will form the basis for any changes to be made within the centre.

Q. *What do staff need in order to undertake the Staff Observations?*

Each primary contact staff member must have access to a copy of the self-study Documents within the *Workbook* (refer to *Workbook* page 39). They will also need to have a clear idea of the task. It is important for all centre personnel to understand that this process is not threatening. The primary contact staff analyse the care and education provided to the group of children by the team.

The Staff Observation process is an opportunity for the team to reflect upon the care and education provided to the group of children in its care.

The Staff Observation process is *not* an individual performance appraisal.

How much time do staff need to complete observations?

This will vary from centre to centre. It will be important to decide as a team how much time is needed, and then to suggest a suitable time frame to the centre accreditation committee. Time allocations will relate to the time available for the centre to complete the QIAS process.

How we did it.

Staff observations

Day St

When we received the documents we immediately handed them out to staff and gave them plenty of time to become familiar with the words and phrasing of the Staff Observations. A high proportion of our staff has English as their second language. After their initial reading we talked through the wording of the document and cleared up a lot of questions.

We decided that we would need about six to eight weeks for the first round of observations. That period would give us plenty of time to understand the principles and the criteria. Each staff member was responsible for completing a copy of the Staff Observations.

If they were 'stuck' on a particular principle I advised them to leave it out for a while and just move onto the next principle. I then worked with individual staff members, interviewing them on aspects of the principles in order to gain their rating. This kept us steadily working through the observations. We allocated specific time for completion of the Staff Observations in our programming release time. The observations were easily completed over a period of two months. The staff team did not feel rushed.

Moorinda Bay

As a small centre we decided to work through the principles in our staff meeting time. The size of our centre and the nature of our work place allows us to meet regularly. We selected the principles to concentrate on each week, and in our observations we focused on the criteria for these specific areas.

When we met as a staff team we would discuss about eight principles at a time. We worked very quickly through some which could easily be measured, such as the Health, Safety, and Nutrition areas. The Interactions areas took much longer; we had to take a good hard look at the ways we were interacting. We completed the Staff Observation Records within six weeks. We often talked about the principles while working. For instance we would be working on a display of the children's work, and one of us would remember having read about this area within the principles. We would then locate the principle within the *Handbook* and reflect on what we were doing. The whole thing made more sense then; we were working with the reality of Principle 21!

Dalmonde

The idea of everyone completing a Staff Observation Record in our centre sounded horrific. There was going to be way too much paper around. Our centre has 24 staff members, so we decided to complete one observation record per team.

Individual staff members took responsibility for a number of principles each. They chose principles according to their interests; and they could choose any of the areas so long as the 52 principles were covered for their room and there was an equal workload. We took about three weeks to complete the initial observations. We then put in plenty of time in reaching an agreement for the whole centre. Team leaders from the rooms liaised in order to find an 'agreed rating' and to work out who needed to work on what.

Eventually we came to an agreement. The whole process took about seven weeks but, by the time we had completed our first round, I believe we really knew the centre and our areas of strength and weakness.

There cannot be enough emphasis placed upon the staff completing these summaries and identifying areas of need themselves. The staff team will implement changes only if it feels the change is necessary and important.

Remember:

Staff team evaluate and identify needs
\+ Staff team decides on strategies for improvement
= **Commitment to Change and Success**

Where to now? Putting the profile together

When the Staff Observations have been completed, an agreed staff rating has been established, and Parent Surveys have been gathered it will be time to find out 'where the centre is at'.

The centre accreditation committee and the staff team will be eager to find out how the centre has rated. The *Workbook* provides details of the administrative steps required to reach a decision about the program of care and education as described within the 52 principles. Working throughout the steps within the Task and Timeline Chart will allow the centre to gather all of the necessary information.

How we did it.

Staff observations

Day St

The director of the centre drew up a quick reference chart to ensure that all of the information had been taken into account. This aided in sharing the workload and easing the administrative burden.

When finalising the Report on Current Standards, the director took into account the agreed Staff Ratings and the results of the Parent Survey along with her own overview of the centre. The director then made a recommendation for each principle to the centre accreditation committee, where the final ratings were decided.

	Task	Who's Responsible
1.	Tallying summaries	
2.	(Following discussion & agreement.) Current standards report	
3.	Centre profile	
4.	Feedback to committee	

Following the centre profile there will be a clear picture of where the centre stands. It will be helpful to draw up a list of principles which require improvement in order to reach the next level of Accreditation. This will assist the committee in establishing the level of Accreditation for the centre. It can also provide staff with refreshed energy if they can see how close they are to achieving Accreditation.

The strengths of the Centre

At this stage of the Self-Study Process it will be easy to pinpoint the areas for improvement. For some centres the centre profile will graphically demonstrate where work needs to be done, and for others the graph will show that the centre is already prepared for a visit by a reviewer.

For any staff team this will be an opportunity to reflect upon the strengths of the centre. Looking at what is good and positive in the centre will increase confidence amongst the staff team and generate enthusiasm for the next stage of the process. This is the time to celebrate the current achievements of the centre.

A summary of parents' comments, where they have been made on the Parent Questionnaire, will provide a solid basis for feedback to the team and the centre accreditation committee.

The suggestions for changes and improvements should be put aside for consideration. These will assist in the development of the Plan of Action. Positive comments could be summarised and placed in prominent areas in the staff room or handed to staff individually. It is important to remember that a degree of confidentiality is required.

It is no secret that people respond well to praise. Reflect on your feelings if you were handed this list:

Positive comments from parents via the Parent Questionnaire

- Positive, happy and comfortable place.
- We're very happy with the centre.
- Keep up the good work.
- We hold the organisation in the highest regard.
- This centre is the best thing to happen to our family.
- All aspects are positive...especially staff.
- Staff are warm, friendly and helpful.
- The staff speak with genuine fondness and respect...the quality of care is excellent.

Genuine pleasure and pride will form a much stronger basis for improvement than anxiety about areas which need attention.

How we did it.
Identifying strengths

Day St

Two of our staff members took the responsibility for giving staff positive feedback. One of the girls identified all of our principles where we had rated High Quality. She tabulated these on a handout and signed the piece off with 'this is where we are doing really well...let's keep it up!'

The other staff member wrote all of the positive comments from parents on a large sheet of paper and presented this at the staff meeting. She identified members of staff who were strong in specific areas mentioned by parents, and she made sure that everyone got a mention. There was a great feeling at the meeting; I felt like I was at some kind of workshop on self-esteem!

They did a great job and it was a good lead into our Plan of Action.

The areas for improvement: *Where do we begin?*

Having identified areas in need of improvement within the centre it will be appropriate to commence making changes to the centre. It is often difficult to know where to begin particularly when a number of changes need to be made. One centre team may find it easiest to work on the principles in order of number from one to 52. Another centre may identify principles within a specific area (for example, 'The Program') and then commence work. It is generally recognised that physical changes are the easiest to make and present the least threatening challenge. Once a climate of change has been established, physical alterations can be followed with behavioural changes. Behavioural changes require more time and consolidation.

The team at the centre may already be aware that changes need to be made, particularly where the staff observation process has highlighted an oversight. A change may even be implemented before the Staff Observations have been completed, simply because a solution will be glaringly obvious. The criteria within the principles will direct staff toward appropriate practice. They may have been feeling uncomfortable about the way things have been working in particular areas, but unable to identify the source of the problem. Working through the criteria encourages a carer to reflect on what the problem may be.

How we did it.

Principle 46

Day St

The staff team of Day St had been feeling stretched and anxious. Carers believed that they had a reasonable routine for the children but there did not seem to be enough time to spend with the children in the mornings and the afternoon. Staff felt pressured at these times of the day, constantly called away to supervise a child or manage a problem of discipline. They felt in control only when all staff were present at the centre.

As a result of the Staff Observations being completed within the centre, some team members realised that children were not in 'direct sight and/or sound contact by staff at all times' (Principle 46). The team wanted to make changes immediately, so they reduced the physical space available to the children, while increasing the activities in the mornings and the afternoons. Children were in direct contact with staff at all times.

A change was apparent straight away. The frequency of staff interactions increased, helping children to engage in play activities. The staff also returned to the practice of guiding children's behaviour rather than managing and taking on a 'damage control' approach. The environment became more supportive for children, parents and staff, setting the scene for an industrious and calm day at the centre. Carers lost the feeling of anxiety in the mornings and afternoons, and, although busy and active, they did not have to stretch beyond reasonable limits.

Plan of Action

Some improvements will be made incidentally. The majority of changes will demand deeper thought and attention to the strategies required to achieve quality improvements. The best approach to deciding and working on improvements will be to formulate a Plan of Action. The Plan of Action will identify the areas requiring upgrade.

The benefit of writing a Plan of Action will be that all those involved in the process will have an understanding of the prescribed outcome. The goal will be clear and the team can focus on the achievement of the goal. A verbal agreement on action can often lead to ambiguity, but a written document can be re-read for clarification.

Who writes the Plan of Action?

Ideally all of the staff team and the centre accreditation committee will play a part in the development of the Plan of Action. Specific principles will be selected. These will be the principles the centre needs to work on, in order to make quality improvements and to achieve a standard required for Accreditation.

How we did it.
Identifying strengths

Day St

We listed all of the principles that needed to change. We wrote down where we were at and where we needed to be in order to achieve two-year standard of Accreditation (this was the level that we were aiming for). Our list looked like this:

Principle	Where we are	Where we need to be
2	Good	High
10	Good	High
14	Good	High
21	Good	High
23	Unsatisfactory	Good
27	Basic	Good/ High
36	Basic	Good/ High
41	Unsatisfactory	Good/ High
45	Unsatisfactory	Basic
50	Basic	Good

There were small improvements to be made within particular care groups. Individual staff had recognised these and believed that these criteria were being satisfied within the centre generally. These principles didn't make it on to the list; the individual staff took the responsibility for making small changes to the routine and program.

After we had identified the principles we had a general discussion at the staff meeting. Carers selected principles which interested them and then volunteered to write the Plan of Action for that principle. Each person had to write a plan for only two or three principles and so the workload was shared. Within a week we had all of the plans up and running.

Moorinda Bay

The staff at Moorinda Bay asked if the director could write the Plan of Action. At this stage the two carers were not confident of their ability to complete plans and did not want to make mistakes. The number of principles that the centre needed to work on was quite low, so it may have been feasible for the director to write the plans. The director, however, saw this as an opportunity for the development of staff skills and confidence.

A special staff meeting was called and the director 'workshopped' the process for writing the Plan of Action. Once staff understood how to write the objectives, they confidently undertook to write the tasks and strategies required to achieve the objectives.

They were taught that 'this is what we need to do, and now we need the methods to do it'.

Dalmonde

The team leaders were allocated particular principles and then asked to select the team members whom they felt would have an interest in writing a Plan of Action for that principle.

They spent some time helping their team members to focus on the improvements needed.

I then worked with the individual staff members to write the plans. As a non-teaching director I was able to spend the time guiding the staff. Some staff needed lots of assistance and others managed very well on their own.

We had a full set of plans for the principles which we reviewed at the centre accreditation committee. The committee helped out with the plans. One of our parents was particularly skilled in this area and was able to give our Plan of Action a better form. This motivated the staff in the implementation stage.

Writing the Plans

The plans begin with an objective. The objective must be defined in the terms of an observable behaviour. When an objective is given these parameters, staff will have something concrete to work with. It will be clear that a particular change will be required in order to make a quality improvement within the centre. Objectives are specific statements which make steps toward greater goals.

Objectives will usually begin with the word 'to'. For example a simple objective for Principle 41 will be:

To move all chemicals and dangerous products out of reach of children.

The next step in developing plans is the generation of strategies needed to make the change and achieve the objective. This may involve 'brainstorming' for a set of solutions, or defining specific steps toward the improvement. In continuing with Principle 41, possible strategies will include:

Remove toxic products from cupboards which are accessible to children.
Relocate the products to storage areas which are inaccessible to the children.
Check products for original labelling and storage.

The person responsible for undertaking the task needs to be identified. This will ensure that the strategy is implemented. Tasks need to be matched with people's skills, and staff will need time and resources to complete the strategies and to achieve stated objectives. These will need to be included in the Plan of Action.

Implementation of the Plan

The Plan of Action will now provide a charter for change. If staff and the centre accreditation committee have been involved in the development of plans there will be a sense of ownership of the improvements. A collaborative approach will produce the best results, but it will be important to appoint a leader who can encourage and guide the team in achieving objectives.

The director of the centre is the obvious person to take on this role. Skill will be required in taking a supervisory role and keeping people on track, while delegating the implementation of strategies. Detailed plans will assist in this approach.

The set plans within the Appendix are given as a guide and example of the way in which improvements were implemented within the different centres. The diversity of strategies show that criteria within principles will be met in vastly different ways. Plans are individualised according to the unique nature of each centre.

How do we know we have achieved our goals?

Evaluating the Plan of Action

The centre has once again returned to the process of evaluation. The plans and achievement of objectives will be easily measured if the objectives have been written as an observable behaviour.

As an example we return to Principle 41. The objective

To move out of reach from children all chemicals and dangerous products

will be measured by returning to the original storage cupboard and checking whether the dangerous products have been relocated.

This sounds extremely simple, and for some principles measurement of achievement will be easy. Other principles will demand more subtle changes in behaviour and practice. This is the time to return to the second round of Staff Observations and Parent Questionnaires.

The team will accomplish the task of Staff Observations with relative ease. Individuals will have developed an understanding of the language involved and the aim of the task. Centres will need to implement similar strategies from the first round of observations, and should also nominate appropriate time frames. At the completion of the second round the centre will once again have a measure of quality of care and education.

The Parent Questionnaire will again be distributed to all parents. You will need to give parents an opportunity to comment on the changes and improvements. Ensure that each parent has a copy of the questionnaire.

Ready for review

So...at last the centre is ready for review. Once the Self-Study Report is completed it should be sent to the National Childcare Accreditation Council. The time for review is approaching. It is important that the centre submits the report when it has worked through the Self-Study Process and is completely prepared and ready for review.

The staff team and the centre accreditation committee may feel nervous about the forthcoming visit. Take into account the following considerations:

1. The centre has worked extremely hard to reach the point where they are ready for review.
2. The centre is adequately prepared for the review visit and is proud of its child care practice.
3. The Reviewer's role is to scrutinise the Self-Study Report, and to observe and analyse the centre under the 52 principles within the *Handbook*. The reviewer is simply checking that the centre has appropriately measured the quality of its care and education.
4. The reviewer has been specifically trained, and will manage the task objectively and professionally.
5. The reviewer has a background in long day care and will probably be working in a centre at this time. She or he will know that all centres can be calm, soothing, chaotic, 'rain-affected', and crisis-ridden at different times, and sometimes all in one day.

If the team can keep all of these things in mind when the day finally arrives, the carers will mostly be able to carry on with the 'normal' day in the centre.

How we did it.

Getting ready for the Review visit

Day St

The staff of Day St felt very worried about the review visit. Although the director had explained the process a number of times, people on the team still expressed doubt about whether the reviewer would see them at their best or even if the reviewer would understand what was happening in the centre.

The problems were discussed and the staff were told that the reviewer would have lengthy experience in the field of long day care, and may even be an expert on centres with a high proportion of families from non-English speaking backgrounds. The director then organised for another director from the local network support group to visit the centre and do a 'practice review'. This would give the carers an idea of what to expect when the review took place.

The visiting director spent several hours at the centre, comparing the details of the Self-Study Report with the actual practice. By lunchtime it was clear that the centre had indeed rated appropriately. The director then remained at the centre throughout the staff lunch hours to give feedback and reassurance to staff. The staff immediately felt more relaxed and realised that the review visit would probably turn out to be much the same as other days at the centre.

The team still felt a little anxious about the review; but the practice run had certainly eased their nerves. Everyone agreed that the experience had been invaluable.

What next?

Following the review of the centre, the Self-Study Report is returned to the Administrative Support Unit of National Childcare Accreditation Council. All of the information is collated for the moderation process.

The moderators give consideration to the centre ratings and comments and the reviewer ratings and comments, and then form a recommendation for the National Childcare Accreditation Council. The comments made by both the centre and the reviewer are of utmost importance. These are the anecdotal evidence of the quality of care and education for the children of the centre. This gives an assurance that the 52 principles of the QIAS are being followed within the centre.

In making a recommendation the moderators ensure national consistency.

Following an accreditation decision by the National Childcare Accreditation Council, the centre is informed of the award of Accreditation and the number of years between reviews. The centre is given a report detailing the strengths and basis for decision by the council.

Life after the review: *The ongoing process of accreditation*

Once the goal of reaching accreditation standard has been achieved, the staff team, centre accreditation committee, and parents can feel justifiably proud. This will seem a good time to rest and celebrate the success. A great deal of emotional energy may have been spent in the time leading up to the review.

Many staff teams will ask themselves 'What do we do now? Does Accreditation stop here?' The answer is 'no'. This is an opportunity to consolidate good practice and continue to provide the highest quality care and education for the children of the centre. The QIAS requires centres to constantly update their programs, and to undertake an annual review of philosophy, goals, and procedure. This process will ensure that the centre continues to meet family needs within the community, and has an ongoing commitment to quality programs for children.

The QIAS is an excellent tool for improvement and change within the centre. There will be enormous benefits for centres through the ongoing use of the tool. Continued use of the documents will promote familiarity, and centres will utilise the system in a thoroughly integrated approach. Diversity within practice will be celebrated with the implementation of the system.

Accreditation is truly a process... not an event!

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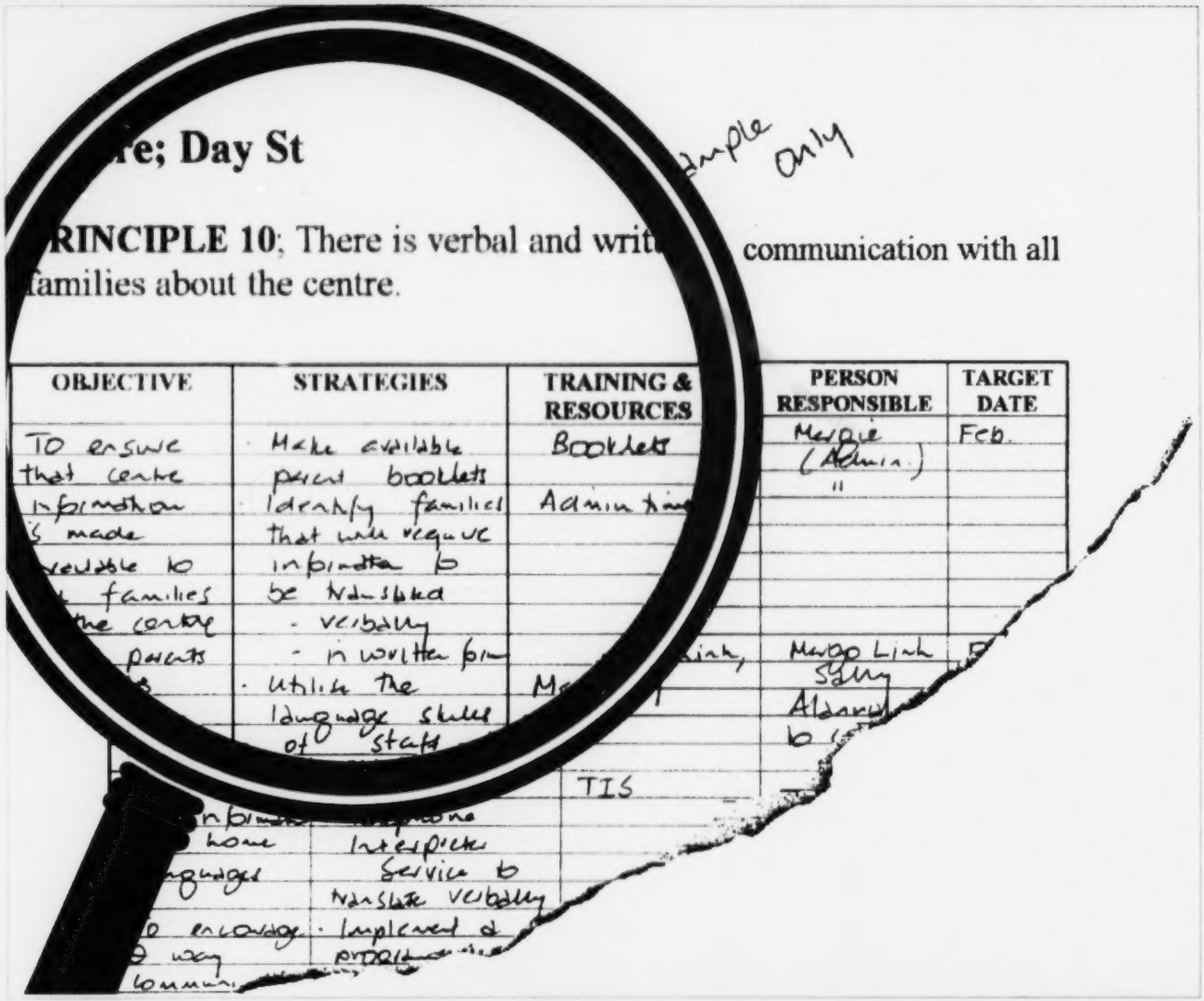
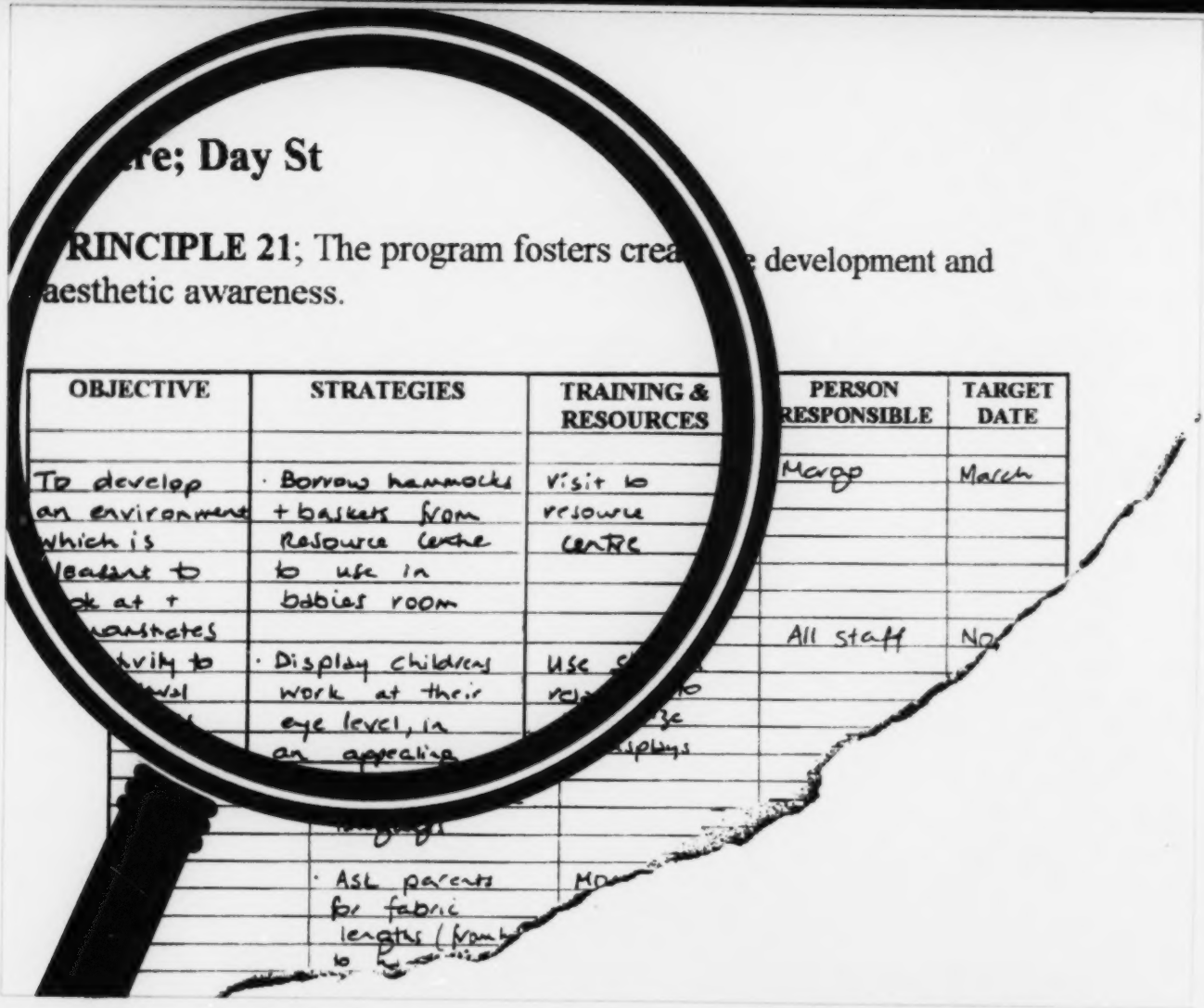


...re; Day St

Sample Only

...RINCIPLE 10; There is verbal and writ... communication with all ...families about the centre.

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES	TRAINING & RESOURCES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
TO ensure that centre information is made ...vailable to ... families ...the centre ... parents	· Make available parent booklets · Identify families that will require information to be translated - verbally - in written form · Utilise the language skills of staff	Booklets Administ... M...	Margie (Admin.) " Margo Link, Sally Alderson to ...	Feb. D...
...n... home ...nguage ...e encourage ...e way ...communi...	Interpreter Service to translate verbally · Implement a ...	TIS		



re; Day St

RINCIPLE 21; The program fosters crea e development and aesthetic awareness.

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES	TRAINING & RESOURCES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
To develop an environment which is leasant to k at + nanstates tivity to wal	· Borrow hammocks + baskets from Resource Centre to use in babies room · Display childrens work at their eye level, in an appealing	visit to resource centre Use s displays	Margo All staff	March No
	· Ask parents for fabric lengths (from	MD		

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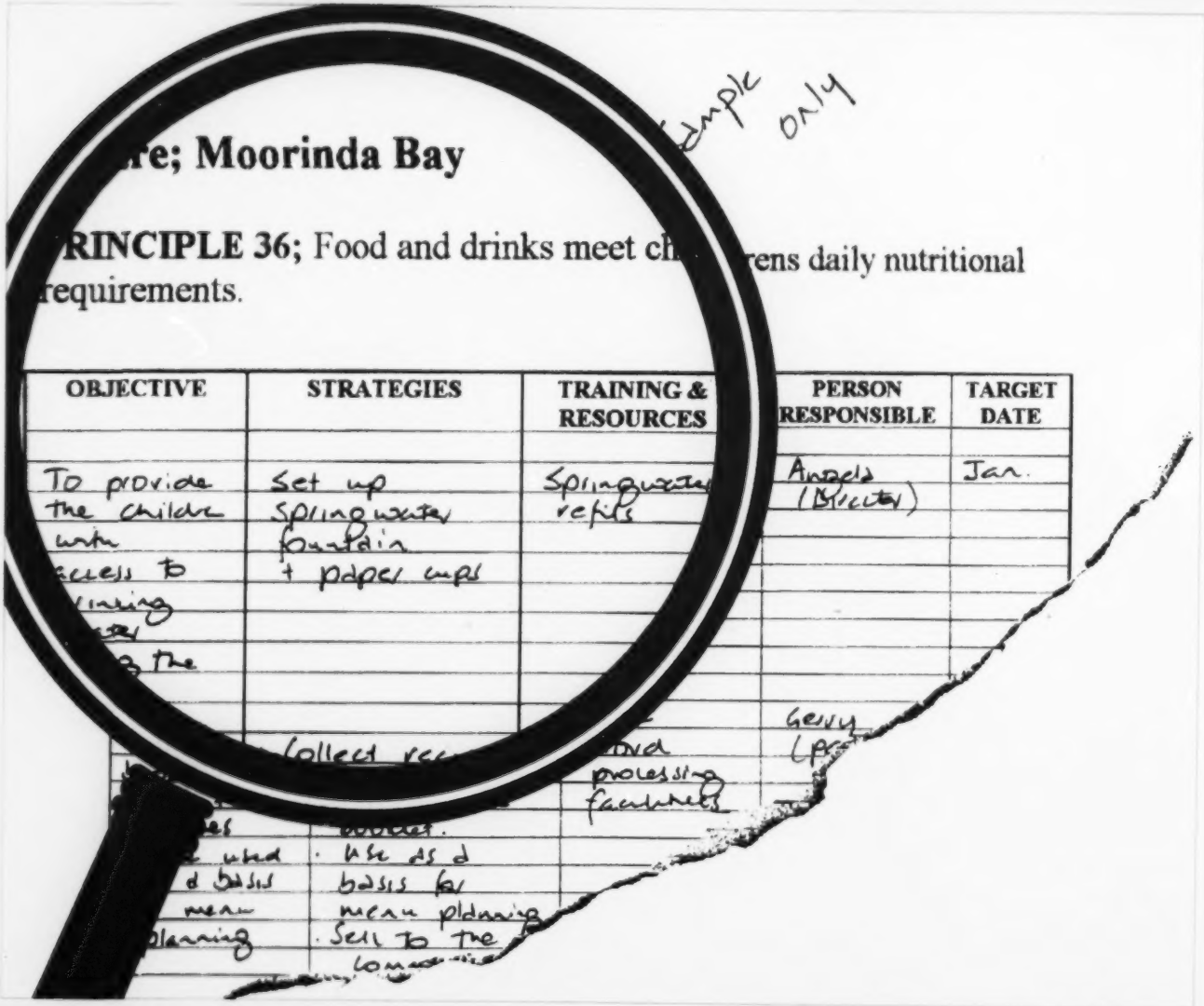
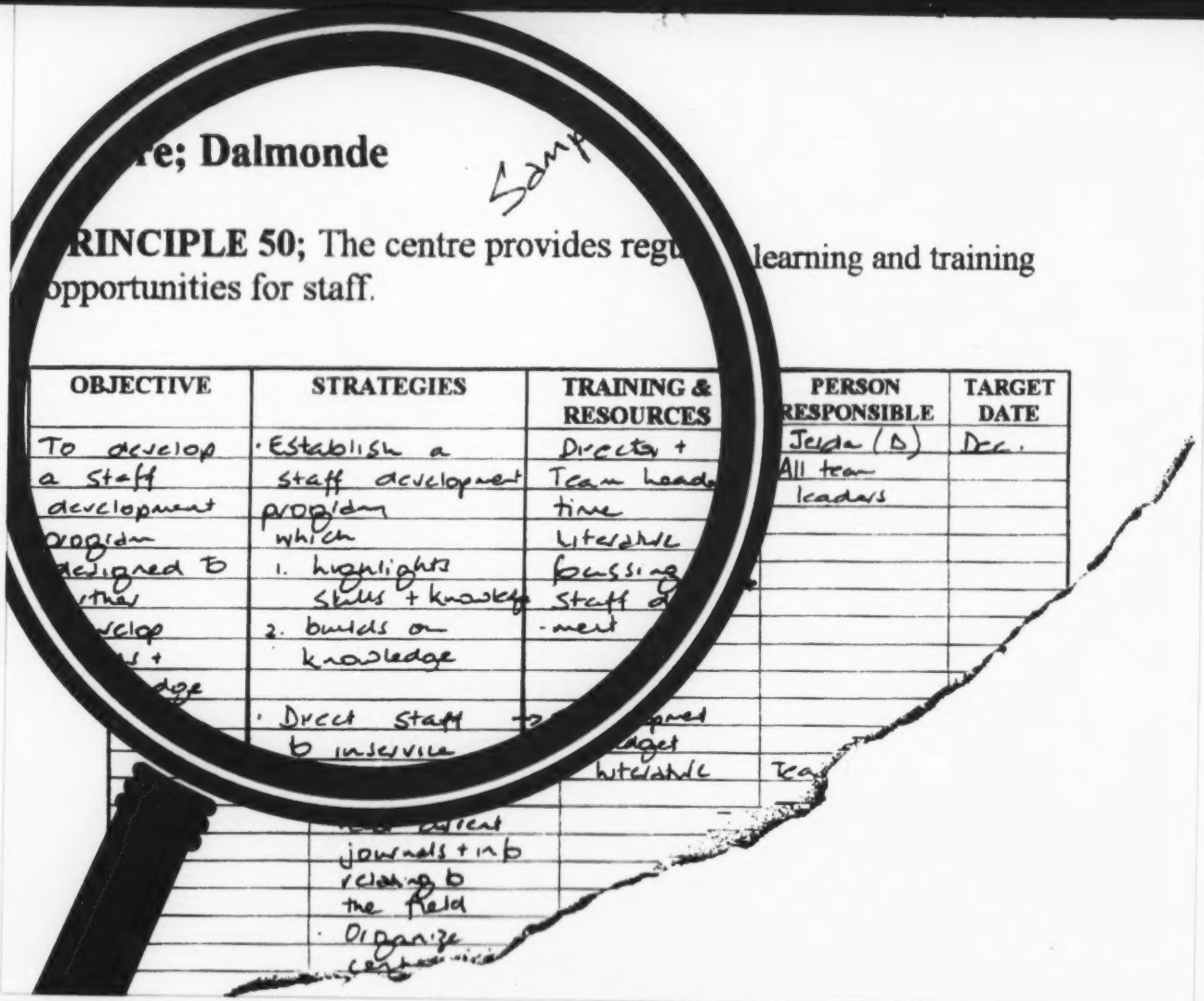


...re; Moorinda Bay

...RINCIPLE 36; Food and drinks meet ch... ...rens daily nutritional ...requirements.

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES	TRAINING & RESOURCES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
To provide the childre... with ...access to ...ining ...er ...g the	Set up spring water fountain + paper cups	Spring water refills	Angela (Director)	Jan.
	Collect rec... booklet. · Use as a basis for menu planning · Sell to the ...	...ood processing facilities	Gerry (Pre...	



re; Dalmonde

Samp

RINCIPLE 50; The centre provides regu learning and training opportunities for staff.

OBJECTIVE	STRATEGIES	TRAINING & RESOURCES	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATE
To develop a staff development program designed to further develop skills + knowledge	· Establish a staff development program which 1. highlights skills + knowledge 2. builds on knowledge · Direct staff to inservice journals + in b relating to the field · Organize	Director + Team leade time Literature focussing Staff d -ment budget literature	Jelda (D) All team leaders Tea	Dec.

Further reading in this series

- **Highlighting health** *Claire Bell*
- **Surviving Accreditation** *Jan Ferry*
- **Staff–Child interactions** *Marilyn Fleer*
- **Babies need more than minding** *Teresa Hutchins*
- **The policy handbook** *Kathleen McNamara*
- **Thought for food** *Debbie Nicol*

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